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SMALL BLACK BOX  
#31 - Final for 2003!  
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Sunday 21 December 2003, 7-10pm  
Institute of Modern Art, Screening Room  
420 Brunswick Street, Fortitude Valley, Brisbane (entry via Berwick Street)  
All ages - Entry \$7

ARTIST INTERVIEWS

Luke Jaaniste talks to this month's Small Black Box artists about long-term creative practice and soundscapes... (For the full interview, pick up the program this Sunday)

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LONG-TERM PRACTICE

In his proposal, Simon Marsh (aka Severin Minus Seven) mentioned that the work for SBB is the result of 10 years of creative development. And I know that Zane Trow has been working on his drone-based laptop work for quite some time now.

SBB: How long have you been working on the sorts of ideas that go into your SBB performance? And what is the relationship between your ongoing practice/creative development and the momentary nature and demands of a performance?

Zane Trow: 30 Years [of ongoing practice]. The performance allows for a certain danger in both presentation and improvisation and a direct relationship with time and space.

Severin Minus Seven: The sounds and studio techniques I work with are constantly changing, invariably every performance/recording is a synthesis of many years of stimuli and experience. A constant evolution of ideas needs good filtration. I tend to see each performance, albeit influenced by the past, as a means to focus, as an artist, on those ideas/emotions that seem more poignant in the now. The concept for example of I did something this way as a direct response to something that may have happened in my adolescence or younger childhood isn't lost on me. Performance really is a culmination of my professional experience. I find what I'm doing now has shades of many creative avenues, some I walked down over 20 years ago.

It can sometimes be difficult to achieve, but I think focus is the key ingredient in gluing all three together, reliable technology also helps. I see all three as being entirely separate entities and yet they're so integrally entwined. A lot of my practise is mostly acoustic, scales etc, while the creative development is mostly dealing with technology and how to most effectively utilize it. The most problematic for me is always the performance as it is so momentary and governed usually by a lot of unknown variables, a lot can go wrong on the night. I try to keep pretty clear and Zen about it all.

Jasper Streit: I have a library of sound that I reference in most of my works. The process of writing electronic music is akin to learning an instrument with infinite possibilities. Any tricks or techniques I discover in a project will likely be used in a

ensuing project. So in one sense, I have been working on my performance for Small Black Box for a very long time.

On the other hand, I program a different setup for just about every performance that I make. That's what I like about using patching/modular software, changing one's setup is only a matter of programming a new patch.

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THE NOTION OF SOUNDSCAPE

Various notions of sound-as-scape have developed along the trajectory of electronic-based music, with some of the more prominent examples being extended durations, drones, hypnotica (loop-based minimalism), background music (musak) and ambient sound installation. You all seem to work in this area. Zane and Simon's proposals to SBB also mentioned use of Indian material, specifically the tamboura which is a drone-based instrument, and ragas which to me suggest soundscape through use of extended improvisation around scalar modes/arpeggios.

SBB: What is your take on sound-as-scape?

Zane Trow: Well drone, loop and improvisation - like Paul Klee said that he "took a line for a walk" in his drawing - I take sounds for a walk thru time.

Severin Minus Seven: I know the industry needs to deal in genres and bringing similar styles together under categories, if anything to make it easier for the consumer.

Hearing is a major sensory organ. What we hear can greatly affect our state of mind and emotions. Sound is a vibration it's said to have the power of life and death. I personally see it as a journey. Each day for me is an ongoing pastiche of sound-as-scape. John Cage, a classically trained musician was a pioneer in soundscape. I see it as a means to freely express an event, without being challenged by a genre specific dominant paradigm or constrained by popular formulas.

Having incorporated a six string box tanboura into my musical repertoire for the past seven years, the drone is beyond a notion and in essence it was the repetition of the 3/4 harmonic that introduced me to an ethereal scale, which increased the playing field, so to speak. The tanboura is an acoustic amplifier/harmonic resonator that traditionally sits behind all Indian classical music. Playing it through multi effects and amplified, thereby making it a solo instrument, highlights the stuff going on up the back and brings it up front. It can become quite intense at times. It certainly has the capacity to effect the emotions.

Jasper Streit: In the world of Nietzsche, music was the closest to the Dionysian experience as it moves us beyond language. I think that the sound-scape is an exemplification of this notion of narrative within the music; sound-as-scape. The scape describes emotive sensations that literature cannot conjure - it is really no wonder that contemporary cinema relies so heavily on soundscapes. Though the real issue troubling me is: what is a sound-scape? I think that the term sound-scape faces the dilemma that music has in the post-Cage era. Sound-scape is almost given as a classification to the unclassifiable, non-musical music.

The drone is one lucky punter that often falls into this category. We often joke about how drone music is the new religion, the reverence that is given at events such as Impermanent Audio here is Sydney bear so much semblance to a spiritual gathering.

That's got to be saying something about our secular society and it's desire for spiritual fulfilment.

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